

Message

From: Mary Sigman [Mary.Sigman.8381703@p2a.co]
Sent: 4/14/2021 8:34:23 PM
To: Hesterlee, Craig [Hesterlee.Craig@epa.gov]
Subject: Rescind Permit for Ocean Era Inc. Aquaculture Project in Gulf of Mexico

Dear Environmental Engineer - NPDES Permitting Craig Hesterlee,

I strongly urge you to rescind the permit for this project until scientific data is collected that confirms that this project will not degrade water quality and contribute to red tide blooms and the safety of our wild fish stocks are protected. The project is proposed just 45 miles off the coast of Southwest Florida, within the central area of where red tide blooms form.

Red tide, fed by nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, caused a \$47 million loss in revenue on Sanibel Island between July and December of 2018. The losses occurred mostly in the real estate, tourism and recreational fishing industries. The 2018 bloom resulted in more than 850,000 pounds of dead marine life being removed from Sanibel's beaches.

A lot is still unknown about the organism that causes Florida red tides (*Karenia brevis*), but recent research suggests that excess nitrogen and phosphorus in the waters where red tide blooms occur can enhance and prolong bloom events. Our communities cannot afford another year like 2018. Permitting an aquaculture facility in the shallow Gulf waters in an area where red tide frequently occurs would be irresponsible and would exacerbate our existing water quality issues.

I also have significant concerns regarding potential impacts to native fish stocks in the Gulf of Mexico. The fish used in these facilities are generally of low genetic diversity and require antibiotics and other chemicals to maintain large numbers of fish in confined cages. This can impact native fish stocks through the transfer of pathogens outside of the fish pens, antibiotic resistance, and potential impacts to genetic diversity of native stocks if the fish pens are damaged during a storm event and the fish escape.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,
Mary Sigman
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Fort Myers, FL 33908 .